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The Federal Depository Library Program: Moving Forward

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It's my task today to talk about the strategies for going forward and, frankly, why you should care.

Background

Electronic, networked information has transformed how government information is published. According to the public printer, Robert C. (Bob) Tapella, at a meeting with the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Working Group on the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) on October 15, 2008, 97 percent of government publications distributed through the FDLP are now born digital, and most agencies are now authenticating those born-digital documents. Sixty percent of depository libraries are opting for electronic ("e") deposit rather than print.

The last major revision of the FDLP was in 1962. If I think about the library profession and how electronic information in particular has changed during my professional life and note that 1962 was quite a few years before I even entered the library profession, you can see that the need for change is pressing. We actually have at least one or two ARL directors who weren't even born in 1962. Is there anything in your library today that you are doing exactly as you were in 1962? Much as each of us and our libraries are called upon to transform the delivery of services and our backroom operations, so, too, is it reasonable to expect, require and demand changes in the FDLP.

The values behind the concept of the FDLP — promoting public access to the information and services of the government — are still worthy, desirable and needed in today's world. But the question at hand is how we need to reconfigure services to meet today's government information needs for users who prefer digital information and services. The FDLP we know today was designed and implemented for a print-based world.

Future Directions

Task 1

Our first task is to identify and design a sustainable framework. ARL has recently released a brief document entitled, Future Directions for the Federal Depository Library Program, which articulates the need for and the opportunity to *"identify a sustainable framework that will provide access to and preservation of government information in the years ahead. A new framework would*

address financial sustainability as well as the essential components of infrastructure for collaboration among federal depository libraries.”¹



Such a framework would permit flexibility in the future while ensuring enduring access and providing for the efficient management of the legacy collections to ensure the broadest access to government information. This framework could specify one of more models for configuring collection resources, access infrastructure and expertise. In establishing the models and framework, care would be given to examining the constraints of the current system. The new models need to harness the distributed resources of a network of libraries across the country while breaking away from the state-based requirements that are the hallmark of a system based on accessibility of print material within reasonable driving distances. Existing technologies such as the ability to scan material and send electronically, the accessibility of print-on-demand options and the digitization of the legacy collection can be harnessed to transcend the needs of our print-based model. Does the landlocked University of Nebraska really need all volumes on maritime issues on site? This framework must investigate and identify the benefits that will occur from the new models, particularly as they relate to improved service to users. The effectiveness of the model will be judged as well on the costs associated with moving to the new model and the potential savings over time.

Rather than waiting for the federal government to design, implement and legislate a new model which we may or may not find appealing, it is time for the libraries in the Program to take leadership in designing the Program in which they want to participate.

Task 2

Our second task is to agree on a series of assumptions that will guide design of the framework. The following three assumptions have been discussed with the ARL Working Group on the FDLP:

- The new framework will be comprised of a small number of physical regional legacy collections (print and microforms).
- Protocols will need to be developed (e.g., standards and best practices) for managing, preserving and sharing legacy collections and digital resources.
- The new framework will require a coherent means to access the legacy collections and digital depository resources. This is difficult now because of separate classification systems, cataloging issues and the lack of integration of government documents expertise with other service areas of the libraries. For example, there is no clear sense of how many federal documents, pre-1976, require cataloging records.



New Models under Discussion

Let me give you two examples of new models for which much planning and progress has been made.

The Kansas-Nebraska Shared Regional:

The Universities of Kansas and Nebraska have been working for a number of years to receive approval to have a shared regional between the two states rather than two independent regionals on each of their campuses. This request comes in the context that there are already two states that have shared regionals, eight regionals that serve multiple states, and 13 states that do not

have a regional library. Kansas and Nebraska have articulated that the joint-shared collection would permit enhanced public services, because cost reductions in handling materials would be redirected. These include:

- Additional staff time devoted to identifying, locating and adding links to digitized legacy collections in the online catalog, so patrons can locate e-government materials. For example, it is very difficult to find the correct current members of the Joint Committee on Printing (JCP) online because the JCP site is not correct.
- Increased efforts at cataloging retrospective collections for government materials, thus improving visibility and access for patrons to these collections
- Additional training and outreach efforts to the community, including better outreach to schools, public libraries and other interest communities within the region(s)
- Coordinating and collaborating with the Government Printing Office (GPO) on developing digitization/reformatting projects for the legacy collections
- Repurposing existing library spaces for new needs (collaborative and teaching workspaces, study spaces, etc.)
- Kansas and Nebraska can reallocate at least 20 percent of the effort in each library for cataloging print materials to providing services, because each library will receive approximately 80 percent of the materials from GPO, with 20 percent being sent to only one of the libraries.
- Kansas and Nebraska would be able to integrate government document activities into workflow better, as they would not have to expend staff resources on outdated and ineffective procedures for maintaining, inventorying and preserving multiple copies of little-used materials.
- The GPO will save 20 percent of the printing costs for materials being sent to Kansas and Nebraska, as they will send one copy instead of two in lesser-used subject areas.²

Despite extensive activity, including a strong push by the universities' legislative delegations, the shared regional has not been approved.

Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) Collections of Distinction:

Two plus years ago, the ASERL regional libraries began to explore ways in which they could engage in more cooperative collection management, training, outreach and service activities to improve access to federal government information for the citizens of the Southeastern states. ASERL includes the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. The result was a concept paper which had the

goals of:

- Developing depository collections that include at least five *centers of excellence* for each federal agency among the participating ASERL regional depository libraries
- Ensuring support for improved access to digital and tangible depository collections
- Providing additional outreach and training for all libraries in each state in the region

Since most regional depository collections are incomplete due to loss of material for a variety of reasons (theft, damage, nonreceipt, etc.), it makes sense to develop a system to create *centers of excellence* at each participating regional in ASERL. These centers would consist of the most complete, retrospective depository collections for a given set of agencies and would allow ASERL libraries to continue to have a viable regional depository system for the Southeast. Nothing in this proposal would change the receipt of current materials from GPO at each regional depository in ASERL.

Instead, it is ASERL's intention to create several *centers of excellence* for each agency to ensure that complete retrospective collections for that agency are scattered throughout the region. These *centers of excellence* would be promoted via the ASERL Web site and participation in Kudzu, the online union catalog for ASERL. This would allow all libraries in the region to identify where the most complete collection is likely to be for any given federal agency, thus improving interlibrary loan and reference referrals.

Each participating regional would sign a Memorandum of Agreement with GPO in which they agree to build comprehensive, retrospective collections, for a certain portion of the Superintendent of Documents (SuDoc) classification stems on behalf of the rest of the ASERL states. Redundancy would continue to be encouraged for all agencies, i.e., there should be a minimum of five regionals maintaining historic collections for any particular agency. This number of redundant *centers of excellence* could be re-evaluated as historic, legacy collections become available in digital format.

In order to ensure region-wide access to these *centers of excellence* for the SuDoc collection, each participating regional would, for their portion of the geographically distributed, complete, tangible federal depository archival collections:

- Actively replace damaged or lost pieces
- Seek to fill holes in their collections as necessary
- Provide active preservation for the collection

- Catalog the pieces that they own on Ohio College Library Center (OCLC), and identify them as the archival copy
- Participate in GPO's Program to set holdings on OCLC for regionals, free of charge, if eligible
- Participate in the ASERL union catalog, Kudzu, and interlibrary loan/document delivery agreements

Creating these *centers of excellence* would result in more reliable and predictable access to federal publications for all libraries and citizens in the Southeastern states by specifying which regional depository libraries have the most complete holdings for a specific agency. They would be built through the existing Needs and Offers (N&O) procedures that are in place in each state, plus a system for sharing the N&O lists from all of the selective depository libraries in the region with each of the regionals in the ASERL region. For example, regionals might require their selectives to post their Offers lists to an ASERL regionals' discussion list or Web page or to the national N&O list at GPO. This would allow each participating Regional in ASERL to see what is being offered by all selectives across the region in order to fill gaps in the portions of the SuDoc collection that are their *centers of excellence*.³

Why You Should Care

There are currently 51 regional depository libraries which collect and maintain in perpetuity all tangible resources associated with the FDLP. Those regionals can be state libraries, academic libraries or public libraries. Twenty-two of them are ARL institutions. Some of you might be thinking, *I'm just a selective* — this is a problem for those regional libraries to figure out and resolve. Some of you have already begun to dramatically change the amount and number of print materials you are receiving as a selective, because the information is readily available online and space in most libraries is at a premium. A larger question might be what you will be able to do with the legacy collections of which you have custody, specifically the government information provided to you for safekeeping but still the property of the U.S. government. You are not free to dispense with it as you see fit. In fact, your ability to weed and dispense with unneeded print government publications is inextricably tied to the speed with which your regional library can review and give permission for disposal of that material.

In the recently released GPO report on regional libraries, the 51 regional libraries were surveyed at the request of the JCP, which has oversight of the FDLP and GPO. At that time, 10 of those regional libraries were considering the option of relinquishing their regional status. One of those libraries already has — the State Library of New Mexico. One director of an ARL regional library noted at a recent meeting that, while they were not planning to abandon their regional status, they were certainly currently not fulfilling their responsibilities.



When a regional relinquishes its status, GPO collections in that state in all selectives are frozen and cannot be weeded, because there is no regional library to certify availability of that material for posterity.

As the economic situation deepens and the realities of budgets become clear, we may see the final straw on the camel's back from some institutions that no longer feel they can sustain the responsibilities of regional depository membership. As with so much of which we are stewards, it is critical that we design and drive the change we are seeking rather than allowing the future simply to happen.

Vision for the Future

Most of those libraries working for changes can agree on the following elements of a new vision for the FDLP:

- Five to 10 regionals spread across the country with responsibility for legacy collections up to a certain date of publication

- Electronic access going forward that is authoritative and authenticated by GPO
- Digitization of the legacy collection
- Provision of service and expertise in remaining regionals on a statewide or regional basis

Pieces of this vision have already been proven. For example, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) decided this past year not to print the federal budget. Instead they created it in digital form and GPO authenticated it; OMB confirmed that it was the authentic version. Going forward, there will be no distribution of a printed Budget of the United States Government to regional libraries; only the legacy collection remains.

So, you've heard the saying that it takes a village to raise a child. Well, in my opinion, it is going to take far more than a village — it is going to take all research libraries united with a common vision — to change the Federal Library Depository Program. ■



Notes

1. Association for Research Libraries, "Future Directions for the Federal Depository Library Program," 4 December 2008.
2. Conversation with the director of the University of Kansas and University of Nebraska, 3 December 2007.
3. Concept Paper for the Development of ASERL Collaborative Federal Depository Collections and Service Models, September 2007.